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## Allied Strategy in the Near East

BY LOUIS E. FRECHTLING

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# Allied Strategy in the Near East

BY LOUIS E. FRECHTLING

THE Near Eastern region, which lies south of the long Russian front, east of the desert battlefields of Libya, and west of the vast zone of conflict in southeast Asia, today occupies a central position in world strategy. Through it run the transportation routes by land and sea over which troops and matériel can be shifted from one front to another, and through it also pass the communication lines which assure the coordination of activities of the various Allied armies. The Near East is, therefore, the keystone of the Allied defense structure.

The relative strengths of the Allies and the Axis in the Near East have varied greatly since June 1940. Recovering from a dangerously weak position after the fall of France and Italy's entry into the war, the British gathered sufficient power in the Near East to overrun half of Libya and eliminate the Italians in East Africa during the winter of 1940-41. The Nazi spring offensive in the Balkans, however, compelled the British to deplete their forces in North Africa, thereby losing Libya, and to yield Yugoslavia, Greece, Crete, and the Greek islands in the Aegean. Hitler, instead of continuing the drive to the southeast, decided to attack Russia, thus relieving the pressure on the Allies and enabling them to move far into Libya for a second time in November and December 1941. Again, however, the Axis forces were able to seize the initiative and are now counter-attacking successfully in Cyrenaica.

The Nazis may again resume their march toward the Near East,<sup>1</sup> where they can seize objectives of great strategic importance, as well as economic resources of some value. By establishing control over the land bridge which unites Europe, Asia and Africa, Hitler could seize the nexus of the Allied defensive position in the Eastern Hemisphere. The first effect would be to sever important connections between the U.S.S.R. and the

outside world. Then, as the Germans obtained bases of operations on the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Aden, their raiders could harass Allied shipping moving across the Indian Ocean. The Near East would also be excellently situated for operations against India and Burma which, already menaced by the rapid Japanese advance into Thailand and the Malay Peninsula, would be threatened on two fronts simultaneously.

## ECONOMIC STAKE IN THE NEAR EAST

The economic importance of the Near East in the present conflict is not measured in terms of its over-all contribution to the world's commerce. In 1938 exports of all Near Eastern countries together were valued at \$287,700,000, and imports at \$339,400,000. This amounted to only 2.3 per cent of the world's trade.<sup>2</sup> The comparative unproductivity of this region is due not so much to unfavorable climate, lack of arable land and natural resources, and scarcity of population, as to the need for capital and means of transportation to exploit basic assets.<sup>3</sup> Recent developmental work, especially in Turkey, Palestine and Egypt, has begun to open up the resources of the area, but the process is just getting under way. Exception must be made, of course, for the oil industry, which has been under the control of British, American and other Western interests for four decades.

Among the products of the Near East, petroleum is undoubtedly the most significant in time of war. The oil fields of southern Iran, connected by pipeline with the giant Anglo-Iranian Company refinery at Abadan, produce about 78 million barrels annually. Most of the oil of the Mosul district in Iraq (25 million barrels a year) is piped

1. Despite the heavy losses incurred in Russia and the reports of growing pessimism and dissension within Germany, the Nazi army is probably still capable of taking offensive action. For an evaluation of Hitler's present military and economic position, see "The United States at War," *Foreign Policy Reports*, January 1, 1942.

2. *Statistical Yearbook, 1939-40* (Geneva, League of Nations, 1941), pp. 188-89. Includes Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Palestine, Egypt, Cyprus, and Aden. The units used are old U.S.A. gold dollars.

3. The relative poverty of the Near East is indicated by estimates of the average real income per capita, calculated in terms of "international units" for the period 1925-34: United States, 1,381; Palestine and Egypt, 300-400; Turkey, Syria and Cyprus, 200-300; rest of the Near East, under 200. Colin Clark, *The Conditions of Economic Progress* (New York, Macmillan, 1940), pp. 41, 54-55.

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to refineries and outlets at Haifa, Palestine, and Tripoli, Lebanon. The actual production of recently discovered fields in Egypt, the Bahrein Islands, and Saudi Arabia is small (18 million barrels in 1940), but reserves are said to be large. Continued access to Near Eastern oil is vital to the Allied war effort, especially since the only other available sources in the Eastern Hemisphere are the East Indian fields, some of which have already been occupied by the Japanese.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, if the oil fields of the Near East were to fall under German control, their present production would cover the import requirements of Nazi-dominated Europe (about 110 million barrels in 1937). Actually, the Nazis are not in desperate need of petroleum, for their synthetic oil plants and expanded production of crude oil apparently meet their wants.<sup>5</sup> An immediate threat to the Near Eastern fields would probably result in destruction by the Allies of the wells, plants and pipelines, making exploitation of the fields by their enemies very difficult for at least a year.

Of other Near Eastern mineral products, chrome ore, employed in the manufacture of hard steels and armor plate, is important. The output of mines in Turkey, the world's largest producer, used to go largely to Germany, but most if not all exports are now sent to the United States. The British island of Cyprus is a producer of copper and asbestos, and the British mandated territory of Palestine exports important supplies of potash, used for fertilizer and explosives, and bromine, a constituent of high octane gasoline, from the Dead Sea region.

Among the agricultural products, cereals, fruits, olive oil, dates and other items which do not require intricate processing are purchased in large part for consumption by the Allied forces. On the other hand, the cotton, mohair, wool and other products which must be sent abroad are glutting the markets. In some cases (e.g. Egyptian cotton), the British have agreed to buy a part or all the output, thereby relieving economic distress among the producing classes.

If the Germans could incorporate the Near East into their *Lebensraum*, they would solve only a few of their raw material and foodstuff problems—except, of course, that of oil. Provided that production facilities were taken over intact, the Near East would more than cover Nazi Europe's requirements of fruits, and would meet about 30 per cent of its deficit in cotton, 20 per cent in to-

bacco, 8 per cent in wool, 5 per cent in copper, 3 per cent in cereals, and 2 per cent in vegetable oils and seeds. For many of Europe's serious shortages—fibers other than cotton and wool, furs and hides, and some minerals—the Near East would be of no benefit.<sup>6</sup>

#### BUILDING THE ALLIED FRONT

The stakes at issue in the Near East have been considered sufficiently important to justify the concentration there of a considerable proportion of the resources—military, diplomatic and financial—available to the Allied nations. As a result, Allied forces now hold a strong, unified front extending from the Libyan desert around the eastern end of the Mediterranean to Syria, thence eastward across Iraq and Iran to Afghanistan and India.

A prime essential in the establishment of a defensive line is the assurance that the populations behind the front are favorably disposed, or at least under control. At several critical periods in 1941, however, the British were obliged to divert forces facing the Axis and employ them against unfriendly governments in Iraq, Syria and Iran. The underlying factors which necessitated this costly diversion can be ascribed to the failure of the Western powers to achieve, in conjunction with the peoples of the Near East, a measure of political stability in that area.

British and, to a lesser extent, French interest in the Near East, which is an essential link in communications with the Orient and a source of oil, required that the region remain under Anglo-French control. But the interests of the great powers have had to yield to the rising Arab nationalist movements, which received much encouragement during the first World War. Compromises were made between imperialism and nationalism. Iraq was given its independence in 1932, and Egypt in 1936. Iran and Afghanistan were freed of foreign control after 1921. Nationalist aspirations, however, were not yet satisfied. Although Egypt and Iraq were free, the British continued to enjoy treaty rights to maintain military and naval bases within their territories. France definitely promised independence to Syria and Lebanon in 1936, but the French government failed to ratify the requisite treaties.<sup>7</sup> Palestine was a source of friction because the Arabs believed, with or without justification,<sup>8</sup> that the Balfour

6. Percentages are based on 1937 trade statistics and do not allow for any subsequent changes in import requirements and export surpluses. Cleona Lewis, *Nazi Europe and World Trade* (Washington, Brookings Institution, 1941), *passim*.

7. "Syria and Lebanon," *Bulletin of International News* (London), July 13, 1940, pp. 841-51.

8. The conflicting promises respecting Palestine made during the last war have been subject to many interpretations. For an

4. For a study of the importance and strategy of petroleum, see L. E. Frechtling, "Oil and the War," *Foreign Policy Reports*, June 1, 1941.

5. "Is There a German Oil Problem?" *Petroleum Press Service* (London), October 1941.

pledge of a Jewish national home in Palestine was contrary to engagements made to the Arab leader, Emir Hussein.

This conflict of national interests and objectives, which broke out into open fighting at various times in Syria and Palestine, made the Near East a fertile field for Axis penetration. Through diplomatic intrigue, the use of many types of propaganda,<sup>9</sup> bribery of officials, subsidization of dissident minorities, and stimulation of trade between Near Eastern countries and Germany, the Axis gained many supporters in that region. Plans were apparently laid for action by pro-Axis groups in Syria and Iraq, which were timed to coincide with a German advance into the Near East via the Balkans. The Nazi attack, however, failed to materialize, enabling the British to deal with the unfriendly territories one by one.

#### BRITISH OCCUPY IRAQ AND SYRIA

Anti-British sentiment first became apparent in Iraq, where a former Premier and tool of the Axis, Rashid Ali al-Gailani, seized control of the government on April 4, 1941. Taking precautionary measures, the British moved additional troops into Iraq, which led Rashid Ali to open hostilities on May 2. After a four-week campaign, in which small British mechanized and air forces moved on Baghdad from the Persian Gulf and Palestine, the usurper fled to Iran and an armistice was signed on May 31. The government restored by the British was headed by Jamal al-Midfai, known in the past as anti-British. The attempt to propitiate Iraqi nationalist sentiment was abandoned when Nuri as-Said, an experienced statesman and friend of Britain, was made Premier early in October.

During the Iraqi campaign, German planes sent to Rashid Ali's aid used airfields in Syria, which remained under Vichy's control after the fall of France. The acquiescence, if not cooperation, of Vichy officials when German technicians demanded admission to the mandated territory indicated the possibility that the Nazis might establish a strong base there. After the Syrian government had refused Allied demands to exclude the Germans, the British bombed Syrian airfields appropriated by the Nazis, and then, with the assistance of Free French troops, struck on June 8.

analysis from the Arab point of view, see George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening* (Philadelphia, Lippincott, 1939); from the Zionist side, see T. R. Feiwel, *No Ease in Zion* (New York, Knopf, 1939).

9. See a thorough study by Bernard Vernier, *La politique islamique de l'Allemagne* (Paris, Centre d'Etudes de Politique Etrangère, 1939); also Charles J. Rolo, *Radio Goes to War* (New York, Putnam, 1942), pp. 45-48; and Thomas Grandin, "The Political Use of the Radio," *Geneva Studies* (Geneva), August 1939, especially pp. 44-55.

Hostilities were prolonged by the stubborn resistance of the Vichy forces and were not halted until July 12. Frenchmen who preferred Pétain to de Gaulle were expatriated. Military control of the territory was retained by the British, while civil affairs were placed in the hands of the Free French. After some delay, the latter implemented the pledge made at the opening of the campaign, granting the independent status to Syria and the Lebanon which had been promised by the French Republic in 1936. Dissatisfaction still exists in Syria, however. The Free French installed as President of the new state Taj ed-Din al-Hassani, instead of reinstating the former (Nationalist) President.<sup>10</sup> The Syrian Cabinet, however, is a coalition, including representatives of all major political groups.

#### IRAN

Allied intervention in a third Near Eastern state was deemed necessary when refugee Nazi agents joined the one thousand German engineers, business men and "tourists" in Iran. The Allies, wishing to safeguard the oil fields and remove obstacles to the flow of supplies to Russia, requested expulsion of the Germans and full cooperation from the government of the Shah, Riza Pahlevi. Replies from Tehran were evasive, and after some delays British forces entered Iran from the south and Russians from the north on August 25. Resistance of Iranian forces virtually ceased within a few days, but the Shah still refused Allied demands, apparently expecting German aid via the Caucasus. Meanwhile dissident elements, which had long chafed under the Shah's arbitrary rule, demonstrated their dissatisfaction. Beset by external and internal pressures, Riza abdicated on September 17 in favor of his 22-year-old son, Mohammed. The country remains under Allied (largely British) control. Negotiations in Tehran probably prolonged by mutual suspicion of the British and Russians, were finally terminated by a treaty between Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and Iran, signed on January 29, 1942. The powers obtained the right of stationing troops in Iran and controlling all means of communication in the country. In return, they agreed to defend Iran against attack and to terminate the alliance six months after the end of the war.<sup>10a</sup>

By force of arms the British have obtained a dominant position in all the areas of immediate strategic importance in the Near East. Allied forces occupy Syria, Iraq and Iran, and are stationed in

10. "Calm in the Levant," *The Economist* (London), October 18, 1941, p. 470.

10a. *The New York Times*, January 31, 1942.



Egypt by treaty right. Garrisons have been established in British-controlled areas elsewhere in the Near East for some time—on the island colony of Cyprus, in the mandated territories of Palestine and Trans-Jordan, the condominium of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, and the colony of Aden with its hinterland, the Hadramaut protectorate along the southern coast of Arabia. Since the minor sheikhdoms and sultanates in southeast Arabia are in special treaty relations with the United Kingdom, and the government of Kuwait at the head of the Persian Gulf is under British protection, the kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its satellite, the Imamate of Yemen, are the only independent Arab states not now controlled by Britain. King Ibn Saud appears very friendly to Britain and the Allied nations, especially the United States,<sup>11</sup> although some of the members of his *majlis* (council) are reported to be inclined toward the Nazis, and members of the Italian legation staff at Jeddah are said to be active in spreading anti-British sentiment. British and Allied diplomats will probably continue to develop close relations with the King for, as the strongest leader of the Arab world and the keeper of the Holy Places of Islam, his influence is powerful and extensive throughout the Near East. Relations are less close with the Yemen but, with Italian influence in the Red Sea removed, it is no longer in a position to create difficulty.

#### ATTITUDE OF ARAB WORLD

It should be realized, however, that the Allied position in relation to the native populations of the Near East is not yet secure. Channels of communication with the Axis have been restricted, but Nazi propaganda through the medium of radio continues, and agents are apparently still active in Iran and Afghanistan.<sup>12</sup> Within the Near Eastern countries, the pro-Axis elements have gone underground, awaiting a more favorable time to emerge.

The future attitude of the Near East will depend on several factors, of which the most important is the comparative strength of the opposing sides in the world conflict. The outlook of the Arabs will also be conditioned by the Near Eastern policy of the Allies. As Axis activities have shown, the Arabs can be swayed by appeals to national and religious sentiment and by promises of independence and material benefits. Here, as in other regions of the world, the Allies must formulate and publicize widely a dynamic program for post-war reconstruction.

11. American influence in Saudi Arabia has grown during the last two decades, especially through the agency of missionaries, petroleum and mining companies, and other commercial interests. See Paul W. Harrison, *Doctor in Arabia* (New York, John Day, 1940); K. S. Twitchell, "American Ideas for Arabia," *Asia*, November 1941, pp. 631-36.

tion that will win the support of the Arabs, or at least keep them neutral. The outline of such a program is obviously difficult to formulate in time of war and must be on a higher plane than the transparent, specious promises of the Axis. Yet Allied statesmanship should be equal to the task of drawing up a program which will be both persuasive and realistic. The British, in conjunction with the Free French, have already taken the first steps in this direction by proposing a plan for an independent federation of Arab states, including at the outset Palestine, Transjordan, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq. The plan is still in a nebulous state and many problems must be met before federation can be achieved. There are substantial non-Arab and non-Moslem minorities in the region who do not wish to be submerged, notably the Jews in Palestine and the Maronites and Druzes in Syria. The internal régimes of most of the territories are unstable; outstanding political leaders are few; jealousies exist between the various states; and important Arab countries (Saudi Arabia and Egypt) have been omitted from the initial plan. Federation in some form, however, under the aegis of the British and to a lesser extent of the other United Nations, appears to be the best hope for the Near East.<sup>13</sup>

#### PALESTINE

Among the immediate issues in Allied Near Eastern policy, the position of the Jews in Palestine is the most significant. The Zionists have become increasingly concerned over the status of the Jewish National Home in Palestine, promised to them in the Balfour Declaration of 1917.<sup>14</sup> Within recent years they have seen the British government restrict their activities in Palestine through the White Paper of 1939, which drastically limited immigration of Jews and land sales from Arabs to Jews. At the same time, the plight of Jews in Europe has become progressively more desperate.<sup>15</sup> The Zionists have therefore vigorously pressed their case, with a modification of British

12. Both Haj Amin al-Husseini, ex-Mufti of Jerusalem, and Rashid Ali al-Gailani, former *de facto* ruler of Iraq, slipped through British hands and are now broadcasting from Nazi stations.

13. For discussions of the future of the Near East, see Albert Viton, "Can the Arab Peoples Unite?" *Asia*, December 1941, pp. 715-18; "Arab Nationalism and the War," *Round Table*, September 1941, pp. 698-708.

14. The Declaration is contained in a letter from Lord Balfour (British Foreign Minister) to Lord Rothschild, dated November 2, 1917. For a facsimile of the letter and an extended bibliography, see "A List of References on the Balfour Declaration and the Mandate for Palestine," *Zionist Archives and Library* (New York, November 2, 1941).

15. For a documented survey of anti-Semitism in Europe, see *Jews in Nazi Europe, February 1933 to November 1941* (New York, Institute of Jewish Affairs, November 1941).

restrictions in Palestine as their immediate objective and the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine as their long-range aim. To secure these objectives, Zionist leaders in Britain and the United States have urged the creation of a distinct Jewish Army,<sup>16</sup> which would participate in the war in the same manner as the forces of the refugee governments now located in London and carry on the tradition of the Jewish Legion which fought in the last conflict.<sup>17</sup> The campaign on behalf of the Jewish Army has been organized among the public in the United States and Great Britain, in the hope of persuading the respective governments to take action. Neither London nor Washington has agreed, however, probably on the ground that the creation of such an army would exacerbate relations with the Arabs and give the Axis propagandists a powerful weapon. The Arabs have never accepted the concept of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, believing that on geographical, historical and legal grounds the territory is rightfully theirs. The establishment of a Jewish Army in Palestine would be taken as an indication that Britain had acceded to demands for a separate Jewish state, and might lead to a renewal of the outbreaks which occurred in Palestine in 1936-39. It is probable, therefore, that the Allied governments will refuse to alter the status quo in the Levant for the duration of the war. As for the Zionists, already contributing actively to the prosecution of the war, they can hardly do otherwise than continue to fight their worst enemy, Nazism.<sup>18</sup>

#### TURKEY—UNEASY NEUTRAL

Now that British control has been established from Libya to Afghanistan, Turkey is the only remaining Near Eastern non-belligerent between the Axis and Allied lines. Its military-strategic importance is enhanced by the fact that its territory forms an inter-continental bridge between Europe and Asia, and that it controls the Black

Sea's only outlet. Rivalry between the great powers for influence in Ankara, intense since early 1939, has reached a high pitch since the Nazi divisions have been forced to retreat in Russia.

Contemporary Turkey<sup>19</sup> is a strong state whose regeneration after 1919 was due principally to the leadership of Mustafa Kemal (later Kamal Atatürk), who died in November 1938. His successor as President of the Republic and head of the only political organization, the People's Party of the Republic, is İsmet İnönü, whose record includes service as a high army officer, a diplomat, and three terms as Prime Minister. The nature of the state developed under Atatürk is indicated by the six-point program which he gave to the People's party. According to this program, the state is based on: republicanism—if not in the western sense, at least in form, since members of the legislature are elected; nationalism—conscious of unity without being fanatical or imperialist; populism—Turks have equal rights and privileges; *étatisme*—the state exercises close control over and often intervenes actively in economic life; secularism—Islam is divorced from the state; and revolution or reform—Turks cannot afford to wait for change through gradual evolution.<sup>20</sup> Applying these principles, the leaders of the Turkish reformation have built a unified, progressive state commanding the loyalty of almost all the people. Despite the comparatively strong position of Turkey among its immediate neighbors, Atatürk and his followers have specifically renounced any imperialist or irredentist program.<sup>21</sup>

The Turkish government, which is anxious to maintain peace and order, accepted the following principles as the foundations of its foreign policy: friendship with the Soviet Union, the closest great power; friendship with Britain and France, dominant Mediterranean powers; leadership in the Balkan Entente and Conferences, which sought to

19. Area (including *Hatay*), 304,492 square miles; population in 1940, 18,089,901.

20. For text of program, see D. E. Webster, *The Turkey of Atatürk* (Philadelphia, American Academy of Political and Social Science, 1939), p. 307; for discussions of the nature of the Turkish reformation, see *ibid.*, pp. 162-72.

21. Two exceptions may perhaps be made. Turkey disputed the sovereignty of the Mosul district with Great Britain (holding the mandate for Iraq) until the League of Nations Council gave it to the latter in 1925. The Turks later renounced all claims to Mosul. The second case involves the districts of Alexandretta and Antioch, now called the *Hatay*. A part of Syria after 1921, it was given special treatment by the French in view of its large Turkish population. When France appeared ready to give Syria its independence in 1936, Ankara, fearing that the Turks would be submerged in an Arab-ruled Syria, demanded special treatment for the *Hatay*. After a plebiscite which did not clearly establish a Turkish majority, an Autonomous Republic within Syria was established in 1937. Two years later France ceded the territory to Turkey outright. Webster, *The Turkey of Atatürk*, cited, pp. 114-16, 125-26.

16. It should be pointed out that with respect to a Jewish fighting force, as on other issues, Jewish opinion is by no means united. Large numbers of Jews in this country and abroad do not embrace Zionism, and among Zionists themselves there are conflicts of view. Some Zionists conceive of a "Jewish Army" as a unit or units of the regular British Army. The most vocal of the proponents of a Jewish force, however, think in terms of an independent body under a Jewish flag. See "The Problem of a Jewish Army," *Jewish Affairs*, October 1941, p. 4.

17. The so-called Jewish Legion of 1915-19 was composed of 10,000 volunteers from Britain, the United States, and the Near East, organized into four battalions, of the Royal Fusiliers, an integral part of the British Army. About half of the soldiers were trained in time to take part in the campaign in Palestine under Allenby. *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

18. See editorial, "A Zionist Army?" *The New York Times*, January 22, 1942; and comments thereon, *ibid.*, January 26.

preserve peace through collective security; and cooperation with its eastern neighbors, highlighted by the Saadabad pact of 1937<sup>22</sup> signed by Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan, which sought to eliminate causes of friction between them. Turkey, however, felt menaced as Nazi Germany began its eastward expansion in 1938. When Britain and France finally recognized the Nazi threat in the spring of 1939, and guaranteed Greece and Rumania against Axis aggression, they also offered Turkey a pledge of assistance. Following Turkish-Russian negotiations designed to assure the continued friendship of the Soviet Union, Ankara completed a formal treaty with Great Britain and France on October 19, 1939.<sup>23</sup> This pact provided that the Western powers would come to Turkey's aid if attacked by a European state. Turkey, in turn, undertook to assist the British and French if they became involved in hostilities in the Mediterranean or if they moved to fulfill their guarantees to Greece and Rumania. Provisos were inserted, however, that if in any situation the pledges of mutual aid were not applicable, consultations should take place, and that Turkey, in any case, would maintain a benevolent neutrality.

The defeat of France produced a tremendous reaction in the Near East. For some time afterward, Ankara probably expected a complete Nazi triumph in Europe and pursued a cautious policy. The alliance with France was terminated. Although the Turkish government reasserted its position as a non-belligerent ally of Great Britain, it did not implement pledges made in the treaty of mutual assistance, i.e. to come to the aid of Britain if the latter were attacked in the Mediterranean. When Rumania was overrun by the Nazis and Greece was attacked by Italy, the Turks did not move. Turkey's warning that it would regard a German march into Bulgaria, a part of its "security zone," as a hostile act, remained only a gesture. The Turks did not act when the Germans crushed Yugoslavia and Greece and occupied Greek Islands in the Aegean, some of which lie within a few miles of the Turkish coast.

The culmination of Turkey's policy of concessions to the Axis was the signing, on June 18, 1941, of a treaty of friendship with Germany in which the parties agreed "to respect the integrity and inviolability of their territories" and to take "no measure that is aimed directly or indirectly against the other." The pact was obviously designed to protect the southern flank of the Nazi advance into Russia, which started four

days later. Since the opening of the Battle of Russia, Ankara has interpreted Germany's position as being weaker, a judgment which is reflected in its reported refusal to allow Italian or Bulgarian warships to pass through the Straits into the Black Sea, and in its resistance to German attempts to include Turkey within the Reich's economic orbit.

Several fundamental policies underlie these developments. First, a large majority of the political leaders and literate population hope for an Allied victory. Second, there appears to be no reason to doubt that the Turks, if attacked, will defend their own territory. Third, the government found it undesirable, for military reasons, to move armed forces outside the country in order to defend it; the result is that while Turkey's strategic position is highly unfavorable, with the Nazis established in Bulgaria and the Aegean Islands, only short distances from the Straits and from Turkey's largest cities—Istanbul and Izmir—the country's military forces are intact. Fourth, since Turkey is dependent on foreign sources for many manufactured products, it has had to trade with the Reich to an increasing extent as shipments from the Allied nations fell off.

The trade agreements completed with Nazi negotiators have not, however, been unfavorable to the Turks. When a trade delegation, headed by Dr. Karl Clodius, attempted to obtain substantial concessions in Ankara in mid-1941, the Turks refused, and instead drove a hard bargain in the agreement signed on October 7. According to its terms, the parties will exchange £T96,000,000 (\$72,000,000) worth of goods by March 31, 1943, Turkey exporting food products, cotton, tobacco, olive oil and minerals, and receiving industrial products and arms in return. The Turks resisted pressure to export chrome ore, as the entire export surplus has been promised to Britain until January 15, 1943, and denied requests to devalue the Turkish pound in relation to the mark.<sup>24</sup> Finally, it should be noted that the Turks have not allowed German "tourists" to penetrate the country and stir up dissatisfaction and discord, as happened in most of the Balkan states.

Turkey has an army of some 750,000 to meet a German attack. The troops are reported well-trained and, like the Russians and Serbs, have proved adept natural soldiers in the past. They lack many weapons of modern warfare. Britain, however, has attempted to provide munitions, and since May 1941 lease-lend materials from the

22. Text in Webster, *The Turkey of Atatürk*, cited, pp. 124-25.

23. Treaty between Great Britain, France and Turkey (London, H.M. Stationery Office, 1939), Cmd. 6123.

24. "Effect of War on Turkey's Foreign Trade," *Foreign Commerce Weekly*, December 13, 1941, p. 5; "Blow to the Reich," *Business Week*, October 11, 1941; *Manchester Guardian Weekly*, October 17, 1941.



United States have been sent to Turkey.<sup>25</sup> The Turks' defensive strategy would probably involve a delaying action along the Aegean coast while defense lines were being established in the interior plateau region. Supplies and expeditionary forces from the United Nations would be difficult to transport to western Anatolia, since the Turkish railway system is not strong and ports on the Mediterranean are not equipped to handle a great volume of traffic.<sup>26</sup>

#### STRATEGY OF THE NEAR EAST

The course of military developments in the Near East is conditioned by the fact that the region is not a compact land mass, but is composed of areas enclosed on several sides by water. From the south the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea, arms of the Indian Ocean, thrust northward toward the center of the area. From the west the Mediterranean interposes between Europe and Africa a water barrier more than 200 miles wide at most points. And between the Anatolian plateau and Russia stretches the Black Sea, approximately 200 miles from north to south. British sea power in the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean, and Russian sea power in the Black Sea have been effective factors in the campaigns which have taken place in or adjacent to the Near East. It must, of course, be admitted that, in narrow waters such as the Sicilian Channel, the straits between Greece and Crete, and the Aegean Sea, employment of the air arm in conjunction with the submarine has largely neutralized the battleship. On the broad reaches of larger bodies of water, however, surface combat vessels and aircraft carriers have proved important offensive and defensive weapons. As a result, the Axis has had to confine its attacks to land operations or movements over comparatively small bodies of water.

Future German offensives in or toward the Near East may therefore be limited to (1) a renewed drive through southern Russia, (2) a thrust into Turkey, or (3) a movement toward the Suez Canal from Libya. The campaigns in southern Russia have indicated that there are no geographical obstacles to the rapid advance of troops along the Black Sea coast.<sup>27</sup> If the Nazis can again drive

to Rostov-on-Don, they can strike eastward to the Caspian Sea and thence into Iran and Afghanistan on their way to India. The route is long, however, and the transportation problem would be almost insurmountable. It is more likely that the Nazis will turn toward the Caucasus, which forms an effective barrier across all except the eastern end of the isthmus where the "gates of Derbent," adjoining the Caspian Sea coast, afford access to Baku and to Russia's most productive oil fields. Beyond Baku the Transcaucasian region—wild, mountainous, and with few natural highways—would provide the United Nations with a formidable bastion. Presumably, British forces stationed in Iran would join Red Army troops in the Caucasus in opposing a Nazi drive aimed at Iran or Turkey. While the Germans have proved themselves capable of achieving the impossible, the chances of their reaching India or the Persian Gulf via this route appear slight. They may drive as far as the Caucasus to obtain possession of the oil fields, however, and to draw off British troops from other fronts.

Turkey presents a more attractive springboard for the Nazis,<sup>28</sup> and if they strike there, the Allied High Command will be confronted with the same dilemma it faced in Norway, the Low Countries and the Balkans: Should available forces be rushed to aid the victim of aggression (in this case, a nation whose territorial integrity has been guaranteed by Britain), thereby exposing those forces to piecemeal annihilation; or should Allied strength be conserved and concentrated in prepared positions behind the invaded nation? It may be presumed that the difficulties of transporting an Allied expeditionary force to western Turkey are so great that plans have been adopted envisaging a defensive line in the Taurus Mountains and the central Anatolian plateau, roughly from Trabzon to Alexandretta. A stand in this region would utilize topographic advantages provided by the highlands and transportation facilities afforded by the eastern section of the Baghdad railroad. If the Germans were able to force their way past such a line, the Allies would be thrown back on Palestine, which guards the Suez Canal, and on the Persian Gulf area.

The ebb and flow of war in the Libyan desert indicates that if the Germans can achieve superiority in air and mechanized land units for an appreciable period of time, they may again be able to seriously threaten the Alexandria naval base and the Suez Canal. The Axis appears to be successfully transporting supplies and reinforcements from Italy to North Africa, under cover of air

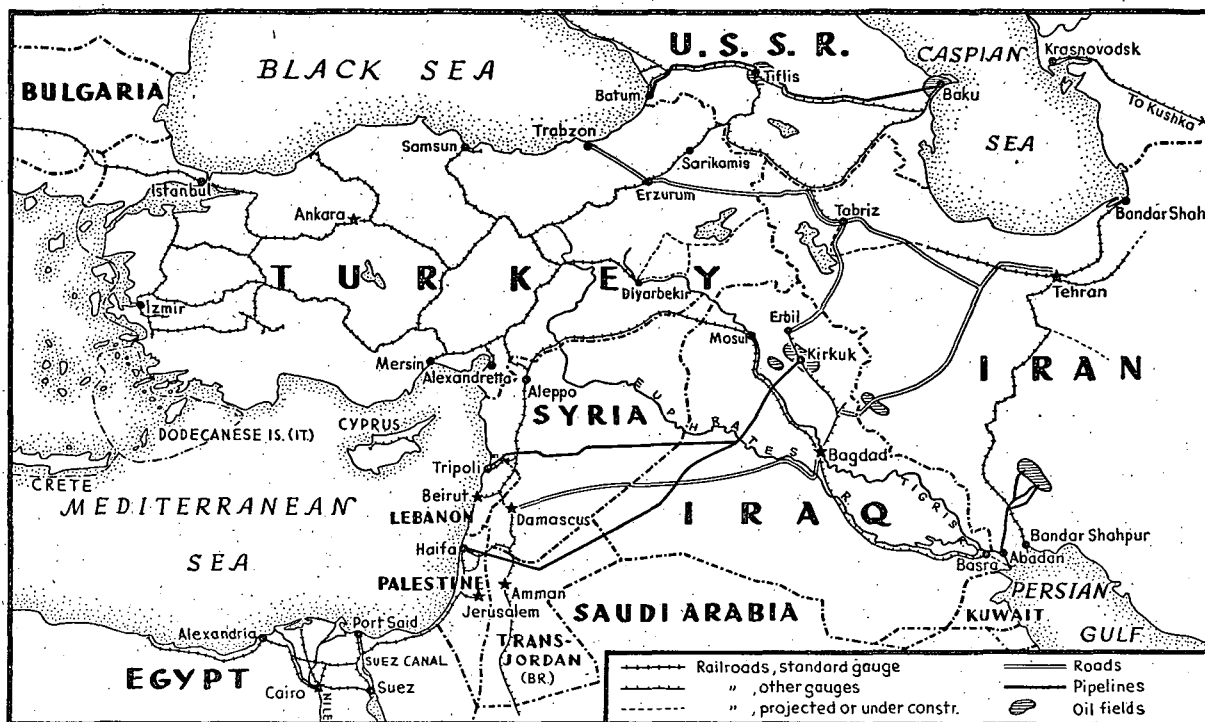
25. *The New York Times*, December 4, 1941.

26. Foreign trade via Mersin amounted to 6.6 per cent of Turkey's total imports and 7.5 per cent of its exports in 1939. Statistics for Alexandretta, the only other port not now dominated by the Axis, are not available. Trade over the Syrian land frontier amounted to 0.2 per cent of imports and 0.9 per cent of exports in 1939. "Turkey: Basic Economic Position and Recent Changes," *International Reference Service*, April 1941.

27. The Nazis were not, however, able to overrun completely the Crimean peninsula. As long as Sebastopol, the Russian naval base, remained in Soviet possession, the Germans were unable to utilize water transport and had to guard their seaward flank.

28. See p. 279.





protection provided by planes based in Sicily, Libya and Crete. From Crete, which lies directly north of the Cyrenaican-Libyan border and only 374 nautical miles from Alexandria, planes may be able to prevent the British Navy from participating in land engagements on the North African coast and from harassing Axis supply vessels. It is not impossible, moreover, that the Germans may attempt a sea and air attack against Egypt, in conjunction with renewed pressure from Libya.

The United Nations in December 1941 had approximately 750,000 men in the Near East. Considering the tremendous area over which they are spread and the strategic points they must guard, this is not a large number. Moreover, it appears that some units, especially those from British Far Eastern territories, have been withdrawn for service against the Japanese. Prime Minister Churchill indicated that Allied weakness in southeast Asia in the early weeks of the war with Japan could be ascribed, in part at least, to the decision reached by the British High Command to concentrate forces in the eastern Mediterranean.<sup>29</sup> If the Allies are to retain control of the situation in the Near East, a continued flow of reinforcements and matériel is required. But the pressure of public opinion and the demands of the British Pacific Dominions for protection may compel military lead-

ers of the United Nations to shift Near Eastern forces to Malaysia, retaining sufficient numbers in the Near East to hold defensive positions but relinquishing the initiative for the time being.

The Middle East Command at Cairo, which now controls the existing forces stationed from Libya to the borders of India, has been altered several times to meet the exigencies of a difficult administrative problem. The highest officer and direct representative of the British government is Oliver Lyttelton, Minister of State in the Middle East and a member of the British War Cabinet. He is also chairman of a Middle East War Council, composed of ranking military officers, British diplomats in the area, and colonial government heads. Subcommittees of the Council deal with supply and transport, administration of occupied areas, and propaganda. The reorganization is especially designed to free military commanders of other than service matters; to assure coordination between the Army, the Navy and the Air Force; and to secure cooperation between the various agencies promoting British interests. While success in war is the final and conclusive test, it appears that an efficient set-up has been achieved.<sup>30</sup>

#### TRANSPORTATION PROBLEMS

To a considerable extent, the Allied war effort in the Near East has been limited by the problems

29. Speech before the U.S. Congress, December 26, 1941, *The New York Times*, December 27, 1941; speech in House of Commons, January 27, 1942, *ibid.*, January 28, 1942.

30. For a discussion of Middle Eastern organization, see "Mr. Lyttelton Reports," *The Economist*, October 11, 1941, pp. 440-

involved in moving forces to the battle lines and providing them with the requisite food, munitions and supplies. The Near East can furnish only a restricted range of products essential for war.<sup>31</sup> A large percentage of requirements must be brought in from other regions, some of them located at great distances. The Eastern Group Supply Conference, which met for the first time on October 25, 1940 at Delhi, India, was formed to mobilize the productive facilities of the British and Allied territories bordering on the Indian Ocean primarily to support the British forces in the Near East. Because most of the lands included are not industrialized, the output of war materials has been confined principally to India and South Africa, which have provided vehicles, armored cars, small arms and ammunition, shells, clothing, and other equipment in appreciable quantities. The outbreak of the Pacific war, however, has diverted much of this production to the Allied forces in southeast Asia.

The bulk of the material used by the Allied forces in the Near East must be brought from the arsenals of democracy in the British Isles and North America. By the same route, the planes, tanks, machine tools, and raw materials desperately needed by Russia must be transported. The significance of the Near East as a channel for supplies destined for Russia has increased considerably now that the Pacific war has cut the sea lanes to Vladivostok and winter has restricted the movement of Allied vessels to Russian ports on the White Sea.

With the central Mediterranean closed to Allied shipping, vessels from Britain and the United States must travel about 12,000 nautical miles to ports in Egypt and on the Persian Gulf.<sup>32</sup> Interruptions to shipping in the Atlantic may compel American vessels to supply the Near East from West Coast ports, through the Pacific and Indian Oceans, and along a course which avoids the Japanese danger zone by swinging south of Australia. By this route, it is about 14,000 miles to Near Eastern reception ports.<sup>33</sup> From American and British docks to Near Eastern harbors by either the Atlantic or Pacific routes takes two to three months by steamer. Time and distance could be saved when transporting aircraft by flying long-range bombers from the United States, via the

Caribbean and Brazil, to British ports on the west coast of Africa, and by uncrating at these ports pursuit planes carried from the United States by steamer. Thence, both types of planes could be flown to Egypt in easy stages across British Nigeria, the Free French Equatorial colonies, and the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan.<sup>34</sup>

#### ROUTES OF SUPPLY

Except for airplanes, however, supplies must be moved by ship and landed at Near Eastern ports which, before the war, were equipped to handle only limited quantities of cargo. Considerable improvement has been made in Egyptian harbor facilities, although Nazi bombing of Suez and Port Said has caused some damage. The principal ports connected with the Persian Gulf are Basrah, Abadan, and Khorram Shahr on the Shatt al-Arab river.<sup>35</sup> They are less exposed to aerial attack than Egyptian ports, but require considerable expansion to handle increased shipments. Bandar Shahpur, southern terminus of the Transiranian railroad, was until recently an unprotected roadstead but may have been improved. Plans have been advanced to connect this railroad with Shatt al-Arab ports by a short spur line.

Land transport presents serious difficulties in the Near East. Distances are great, topographical and climatic conditions adverse, and existing facilities inadequate for the task suddenly imposed by the war. The major portion of the transportation burden is borne by the railroads, of which there are three main systems.<sup>36</sup> The Transiranian railroad, from Bandar Shahpur to Bandar Shah on the Caspian Sea, is 865 miles long and was opened to through traffic in 1938.<sup>37</sup> It is a single-track, standard-gauge line which traverses extremely difficult terrain, especially near its northern and southern ends, requiring 224 tunnels and 4,102 bridges. It does not, therefore, lend itself to double-tracking. At the end of 1940 the railroad had only 80 locomotives and 3,000 freight cars. From the Caspian Sea terminus, which is a single jetty, goods are transported on small steamers to Baku or Astrakhan.<sup>38</sup> A branch of the main

41; and "Middle East Supply Centre," *ibid.*, November 15, 1941, p. 604.

31. See pp. 274-75.

32. New York, via Cape of Good Hope, to Port Said, Egypt, 12,126 nautical miles; to Basrah, Iraq, 11,994 miles. Liverpool, via Cape of Good Hope, to Port Said, 11,406 miles; to Basrah, 11,274 miles.

33. San Francisco, via Tasman Sea, to Port Said, 14,698 miles; to Basrah, 13,784 miles.

34. It was announced on August 18, 1941 that Pan-American Airways would establish a plane ferry-service along this route. *Department of State Bulletin*, August 23, 1941, pp. 147-48.

35. The Shatt al-Arab is the lower course of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.

36. For salient facts on Near Eastern railroads, see *Foreign Railway News* (Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce), June 21, 1940, pp. 245-47, and map in following issue, June 28, 1940.

37. "The Trans-Iranian Railway," *Railway Magazine* (London), June 1940, pp. 357-59.

38. The Russians are reported to have only 50 steamers on the Caspian, of which five old vessels are over 2,000 tons. E. M. Wright, "Iran as a Gateway to Russia," *Foreign Affairs*, January 1942, p. 368.

Iranian line running westward from Tehran has reached, at latest report, a point about 200 miles from Tabriz, railhead of a Russian line leading to Baku and beyond. When the gap—now bridged by motor road—is closed, freight can move directly into Russia, after transshipment at Tabriz to Russian-gauge (5-foot) cars.

A second group of routes begins at Basrah. Freight is carried by narrow-gauge railway (353 miles) or by river steamer to Baghdad, and there loaded into standard-gauge cars for transport to northern Iraq, Syria and Turkey via the Baghdad railroad.<sup>39</sup> Or by continuing on narrow-gauge track, trains from Basrah can run to Erbil in northeastern Iraq (250 miles), whence a motor road leads over rough country and through the Rowandus Pass to Tabriz (275 miles). The third principal rail route starts at the Suez Canal, and runs through Palestine and Syria into Turkey, connecting with the Baghdad railroad. Two transshipments must be made, however, for there is a 234-mile stretch of narrow-gauge track between Haifa, Palestine, and Rayak, Syria. The only other significant rail connection in the Near East is the single line leading from the Caucasus into northeastern Turkey. From the border a Russian gauge (5-foot) road extends to Sarikamis, where change is made to a narrow-gauge (2 feet, 5½ inches) track, leading 120 miles to Erzurum. At the latter point, contact is made with Turkey's standard-gauge system.

All Near Eastern railroads are inadequate in their present state, since they were not planned to bear the extraordinary load of war operations.<sup>40</sup> More locomotives and cars are required, loading platforms and warehouses must be added, the lines double-tracked where practicable, and at least some of the narrow-gauge lines replaced with standard track. It is reported that rolling stock for the Near East has been ordered in the United States, Australia and India, and that an American military mission which visited the area in late 1941 has arranged for substantial construction work to be undertaken by American firms.

Motor roads, beside those already mentioned, may also help to meet immediate transport needs.

39. This is the Asiatic section of the famed Berlin-to-Baghdad railroad, projected by the German government before the last war as an instrument of German policy. It was opened for through traffic in mid-1940. P. W. Ireland, "Berlin to Baghdad Up-to-Date," *Foreign Affairs*, April 1941, pp. 665-70.

40. Wright, "Iran as a Gateway to Russia," cited, pp. 368-70; Ireland, "Berlin to Baghdad Up-to-Date," cited, pp. 668-70.

From railheads of the Indian system at Zahidan, near the Iranian-Baluchistan border, and at New Chaman, on the Indo-Afghan border above Quetta, roads are reported to be under construction toward Herat, in northern Afghanistan, and thence to Kushka in Russian Turkistan, which is linked with the Soviet Transcaspian railroad system.<sup>41</sup> Motor routes across the Syrian desert from Damascus and Jerusalem to Baghdad have been in use for years. But many more vehicles and much work on the roads are required before motor transportation will become as important as that on the Burma Road.

#### CONCLUSION

The task of strengthening United States forces in the Near East is extremely difficult, but can be accomplished if the productive capacities and technical ingenuity of Britain and the United States become fully employed. The stakes at issue in that part of the world are great enough, moreover, to justify diversion of a considerable and increasing proportion of available military power. At present, the most pressing demands for reinforcements come from southeast Asia but, as General Rommel's Afrika Korps moves closer to Suez, Allied strategists will have to face again the problem of securing the Near East. If the Nazis can push to Suez and then down the Red Sea, they could split the anti-Axis front into two unconnected sections and deal with either group at will.

It is essential, furthermore, to hold the Near East in preparation for the time when the superiority of the armies of the United Nations will enable them to take the initiative. The Mediterranean coast of Europe opposite North Africa is the Nazis' most vulnerable flank. Ultimately, the Allies should be able to launch an offensive in that region which would carry the war directly to the German stronghold in Europe. The responsibility of securing the Near Eastern front has hitherto been assumed primarily by Britain. Since the middle of 1941, however, United States-built planes, tanks and other matériel has been flowing to the Near East in increasing volume, and American technical missions, mechanics and engineers have accompanied them. It is possible and even probable that American combat units—military, naval and aerial—will soon take up positions on the only land front where they can meet the Nazis face to face.

41. "Route Through Afghanistan," *The Economist*, August 2, 1941, pp. 133-34; "The Afghan Route," *ibid.*, October 25, 1941, p. 498.

*The February 15 issue of FOREIGN POLICY REPORTS will be*  
ECONOMIC RELATIONS BETWEEN THE AMERICAS

*by John C. deWilde*



# A Guide to Material on the Near East

BY ONA K. D. RINGWOOD and LOUIS E. FRECHTLING

The background of power politics in the Mediterranean is well presented in *The Mediterranean in Politics*, by Elizabeth Monroe (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939, \$2.50). *Mediterranean Cross-Currents*, by Margret Boveri (New York: Oxford University Press, 1938, \$5.00), covers the same area with greater attention to drama and color and less to diplomatic conflict. Miss Boveri treats the countries between Turkey and India in similar fashion in *Minaret and Pipe-Line* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939, \$5.00). A good textbook treatment of European expansion in the Near and Middle East is contained in Parts III and IV of Prof. M. E. Townsend's *European Colonial Expansion Since 1871* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1941, \$4.00).

Few books on the Near East in wartime have appeared. Raoul Aglion's *War in the Desert* (New York: Holt, 1941, \$2.75) describes the personal experiences of a French diplomat in Egypt and Syria during 1940. A description of the early impact of the war is P. W. Ireland's "The Near East and the European War" (*F.P.R.*,\* March 15, 1940), carried through the critical events of 1940 by L. E. Frechtling's "War in the Eastern Mediterranean" (*F.P.R.*,\* February 1, 1941). Developments in Africa, with special reference to French North and West Africa, are surveyed in "Africa and the World Conflict" (*F.P.R.*,\* October 15, 1941).

Considerable variation is apparent in various writers' interpretations of the Arabs' views toward the war. Ladislav Farago ("No Nazi Revolt in the Desert," *Asia*, April 1940, pp. 175-78) and others believed that the Arabs were fundamentally pro-Ally. Events seem to have proved the opposite—that the democracies cannot count on the Arabs. See Albert Viton, "The Near East Today and Tomorrow," *American Scholar*, Winter 1940-41, pp. 72-82. For sober British views of the Arabs' position, see "Middle Eastern Neutrals," *The Economist* (London), January 11, 1941, pp. 72-82; and "Arab Nationalism and the War," *Round Table*, September 1941, pp. 698-708. The Nazis' propaganda approach is indicated in "Der Freiheitskampf der Araber," by Walter Liefer (*Zeitschrift für Geopolitik*, February 1940, pp. 65-70). "Egypt Faces War," by M. E. Randolph (*Harper's*, February 1941, pp. 313-23), is the best summary of that country's reactions.

The full sweep of Turkish history is entertainingly presented in Emil Lengyel's *Turkey* (New York: Random House, 1941, \$3.75). This is an

impressionistic history and not always accurate and profound, but the reader gets the flavor of the Turkish past and present. The Turkish reformation is described with sympathetic objectivity by Donald E. Webster, an American sociologist, in *The Turkey of Atatürk* (Philadelphia: American Academy of Political and Social Science, 1939, \$2.50), and by two Britons, John Parker and Charles Smith, in *Modern Turkey* (London: Routledge, 1940). A more concise account is Lilo Linke's section on Turkey in *Hitler's Route to Bagdad*, by Barbara Ward and others (New York: W. W. Norton, 1939, \$3.00). *Turkey at the Straits*, by James T. Shotwell and Francis Déak (New York: Macmillan, 1940, \$2.00), summarizes the history of competition for control of the Black Sea outlet. Good analyses of Turkey's recent foreign policy include "Turkey and Her Allies," by Halidé Edib, formerly a close associate of Atatürk (*Foreign Affairs*, April 1940, pp. 442-49); "Turkey and the Balance of Power," by Peter Drucker (*Atlantic*, April 1941, pp. 462-69); and "Turkey's Foreign Policy and Hitler's War," by Harry N. Howard (*New Europe*, New York, August 1941, pp. 221-24). The country's resources and trade are succinctly outlined in "Turkey: Basic Economic Position and Recent Changes" (*International Reference Service*, Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, April 1941).

Recent developments in the problem of Palestine are presented from the Zionist side in "Palestine's Role in the Solution of the Jewish Problem," by Dr. Chaim Weizmann (*Foreign Affairs*, January 1942, pp. 324-38), and in "The Problem of a Jewish Army" (*Jewish Affairs*, Institute of Jewish Affairs, New York, October 1941). The best Arab presentation is still *The Arab Awakening*, by George Antonius (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1939). "Next Step in Syria" (*The Economist*, August 9, 1941, pp. 162-63) describes Syria after the Allied conquest.

The underlying factors involved in the recent occupation of Iran are set forth in *Modern Iran* by L. P. Elwell-Sutton (London: Routledge, 1941), and "On the Eve in Iran," by Elizabeth Bacon and A. E. Hudson (*Asia*, November 1941, pp. 636-38). See also, "Iran: Its Position Today" (*Bulletin of International News*, London, June 14, 1941, pp. 749-54); "The Land of Iran" (*ibid.*, September 6, 1941, pp. 1128-31); and "British Interests in the Persian Gulf" (*ibid.*, September 20, 1941, pp. 1193-98). The importance of Iran's eastern neighbor is indicated in "Afghanistan: The Country and Its Resources" (*ibid.*, November 29, 1941, pp. 1907-12).

\**Foreign Policy Reports*. Available from the Foreign Policy Association, 22 East 38th Street, New York, N. Y., at 25 cents each.